

# Vail, Unveiled

Face-lift meets ski lift at the classic Colorado ski resort BY KIM FREDERICKS

**When the first lifts** turned at Vail back on December 15, 1962, the tickets were free, but the snow was so sparse that the number of people riding the lifts for the scenic view outnumbered the skiers. Critics cried that the new mountain would never succeed because it was too flat and too sunny—but that is exactly what the skiing public desired. Tired of steep and icy terrain, skiers flocked to Vail, and by 1969 the resort was Colorado's most popular ski mountain. Today, Vail is America's largest ski resort, touting more than 5,200 acres of skiable terrain and attracting more than 1.5 million visitors each winter.

Vail Plaza Club, a fractional-ownership development on the site of the former Vail Village Inn, will be comprised of 38 residences, a spa and fitness center and two new restaurants.

With its wide-open bowls, bluebird skies and far-reaching views of the Rocky Mountains, Vail is certainly beautiful, but it also has an ugly side. Built in a hurry to accommodate the ski boom in 1969, Lionshead, one of the resort's three base areas, has never been heralded for its architecture. Mostly a collection of styleless concrete buildings and instantly outdated hotels, Lionshead garnered a reputation for being the homely stepsister to Vail Village, with its Bavarian quaintness and the modern Golden Peak. "Lionshead needed a big-time face-lift," says Tim Harrington, a 47-year-old Denver resident who has

been skiing at Vail since he was 8 years old. He has watched Vail change dramatically over the years, seen it add new lifts and sizable parcels of terrain, such as the opening of 645 acres in Blue Sky Basin in 2000. "As a child I used to think Vail was the best place in the world to ski, and I still think that," Harrington says.

Determined to keep such a mindset rooted in the psyche of its loyal skiers, Vail Resorts, the company that owns the ski resort and several others in Colorado, pumped more than \$125 million into improving the ski mountain over the past decade. While its trails and terrain received renewed pampering, Vail's



Right: An overview of Vail Valley, home to the most visited ski resort in the country. Below: One Willow Bridge Road, Sonnenalp Resort's future condominium development, will offer whole and fractional owners full hotel services and amenities.

base infrastructure was starting to show its age. Hotel and condo interiors had begun to lose their fresh appearance and exteriors showed wear and tear. The Vail Cascade Hotel combated the aging process by embarking on a \$20 million renovation, sprucing up their guest rooms and common areas. A few other hotels followed suit, but it wasn't until 2005 that the transformation started to gather speed.

Vail Resorts was planning its own extreme makeover, a project dubbed "Vail's New Dawn," and the final bill would reach \$500 million. Lionshead would be completely revitalized, Vail Village would be refined, and the two areas would become harmoniously linked. The first step would be to erase the resort's ties to the Lionshead name and replace it with Vail Square. "We are getting rid of the concrete look that Lionshead was associated with and are trying to meld the two areas into one community," says Jack Hunn, senior vice president for Vail Resorts Development.

The Lionshead portion of the project will include a centerpiece building



called the Arrabelle. The new structure will house a 39-room luxury Rock-Resort hotel and spa, 70 condominiums and 35,000 square feet of space for retail, restaurants and ski services. An outdoor ice-skating rink will draw visitors in the winter and will be used in summer as an amphitheater for concerts and events. Heated walkways throughout both villages will ensure that no one ever slips on ice.

En route to Vail Village along Gore Creek (the waterway that winds along the base of Vail Mountain) is Gore Creek Place. This development of 16 3,500- to 4,400-square-foot townhomes is nestled creekside and is within walking distance of the Eagle Bahn gondola. A stroll to nearby Forest Place reveals the most exclusive development at Lionshead: A collection of four single-family homes will be constructed on a seven-acre site





The planned Lodge at Vail Chalets, 13 ski-in/ski-out residences with views of the Gore Range, will each be approximately 4,000 square feet in size.

at the bottom of the Simba ski run, offering ski-in/ski-out access and the chance to own one of the largest slope-side residences at Vail. These 12,000-square-foot homes will also tap at the ceiling of Vail's real estate market with their \$14 million to \$16 million price tags.

In Vail Village, the resort company plans to overhaul the area adjacent to the Vista Bahn lift, Vail's main mountain artery. Here, the company will construct a new 20,000-square-foot building for ski services, creating a one-stop place for skiers to buy tickets, rent equipment and sign up for ski school. The Vail Alpine Club will cater to 500 members with a private lounge, concierge services, ski valet, lockers, spa services and reserved underground parking. The resort company's most ambitious project in Vail Village will be the overhaul of its signature property, the Lodge at Vail. Newly renovated rooms, a much-needed 11,000-square-foot full-service spa, a heated outdoor pool and a residential element are part of the plan. Soon those who missed out on reserving a residence at the Arrabelle or Gore Creek can try to secure one of the Lodge at Vail Chalets, a collection of 13 chalets touting spacious 4,000-square-foot plans and a ski-in/ski-out location.

While Vail's \$500 million project is a sizable undertaking, it represents only half of the development that is planned or underway. The tally from a slew of redevelopment projects in the works by

private investors adds up to another \$500 million. The final polish comes from the town of Vail, which has dedicated \$60 million for public improvements, including a new convention center and improved streetscapes incorporating water features, snowmelt surfaces and artwork.

Three adjacent hotel projects will also bring new fractional and whole-ownership opportunities to the village. The Sonnenalp, one of Vail's most luxurious resorts, is adding 40 new rooms and suites and has razed its Swiss Hotel & Spa building to make way for One Willow Bridge Road, a collection of 22 residences to be sold as full and fractional ownerships, offered in one-seventh shares. The property will provide its owners with underground parking, private dining facilities, pool, concierge, housekeeping and privileged access to

the Sonnenalp golf club. Neighboring the Sonnenalp, the Vail Plaza Club takes a fresh approach to fractional ownership by offering shares of at least two weeks. "We are catering to the vacationer who is looking for guaranteed time," says Pat Mitchell, principal partner and director of sales for the Tandem Group, the developer of the project. Its 38 residences will be complemented by a spa and fitness center, and two new restaurants will add to Vail's already bustling culinary scene. The third new project to grace this corner of Vail Village, replacing the current Chateau at Vail, is rumored to be a 118-room, 22-residence fractional project operated by the Four Seasons.

The flurry of activity offers vacation-home buyers a very rare window of opportunity; the chance to secure a permanent or part-time spot at one of the world's best ski resorts.

For Harrington, the decision to buy a condo at the Arrabelle was not an issue, but getting a reservation was. He placed his name in a lottery with more than 500 other buyers who were vying for one of the 70 residences. "I threw my name in the hat and got lucky," says Harrington. He reserved a 2,700-square-foot three-bedroom unit on the fifth floor that faces the mountain. From there, he can continue to watch Vail as it strives to hold its edge among the world's elite skiing destinations, just as he has done since he began skiing there in 1967. ■

## SOURCES

- > **Vail Resorts, Slifer Smith & Frampton Real Estate**, 866.639.8245, 970.479.0245, [www.newvail.com](http://www.newvail.com)
- > **One Willow Bridge Road, Sonnenalp Resort of Vail**, 970.477.5757, [www.onewillowbridgeroad.com](http://www.onewillowbridgeroad.com)
- > **Vail Plaza Club**, 866.371.2582, [www.vailplazaclub.com](http://www.vailplazaclub.com)